A CHILD'S CALENDAR

A poem for each month catches the mood of the changing seasons

JOHN UPDIKE

Illustrated by Nancy Ekholm Burkert

For every child, June is

. . . long green weeks
That never end.
School's out. The time
Is ours to spend.

The elusive feel of a season is a fleeting combination of smell and sight and sound and even taste. The wind, that caresses instead of bites, heralds spring. The first popsicle of the season is a sure sign of summer for a child.

Each month, too, has its own aura which delights the senses. John Updike has captured the swiftly passing months in twelve lovely poems. They evoke the sense impressions that delight children as they discover and explore the changing world.

Nancy Burkert's warmly reminiscent drawings complement the mood of the poems and add their own charmingly distinctive accent.

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JOHN UPDIKE

Illustrated by NANCY EKHOLM BURKERT

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To
Liz
and
Miranda

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January

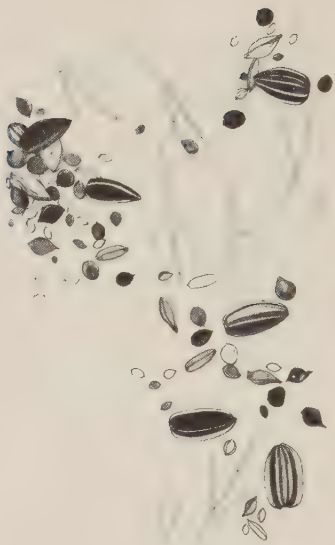
The days are short,
  The sun a spark
Hung thin between
  The dark and dark.

Fat snowy footsteps
  Track the floor.
Milk bottles burst
  Outside the door.

The river is
  A frozen place
Held still beneath
  The trees of lace.

The sky is low.
  The wind is gray.
The radiator
  Purrs all day.

February



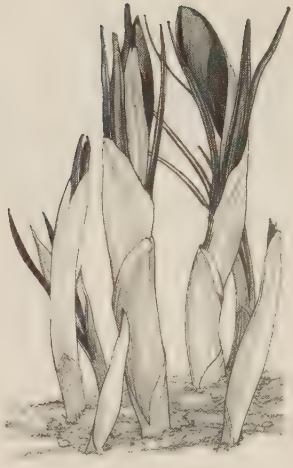
The sun rides higher
  Every trip.
The sidewalk shows.
  Icicles drip.

A snowstorm comes,
  And cars are stuck,
And ashes fly
  From the old town truck.

The chickadees
  Grow plump on seed
That Mother pours
  Where they can feed,

And snipping, snipping
  Scissors run
To cut out hearts
  For everyone.

March



The sun is nervous
  As a kite
That can't quite keep
  Its own string tight.

Some days are fair,
  And some are raw.
The timid earth
  Decides to thaw.

Shy budlets peep
  From twigs on trees,
And robins join
  The chickadees.

Pale crocuses
  Poke through the ground
Like noses come
  To sniff around.

The mud smells happy
  On our shoes.
We still wear mittens,
  Which we lose.

April

It's spring! Farewell
To chills and colds!
The blushing, girlish
World unfolds

Each flower, leaf,
And blade of sod—
Small letters sent
To her from God.

The sky's a herd
Of prancing sheep,
The birds and fields
Abandon sleep,

And jonquils, tulips,
Daffodils
Bloom bright upon
The wide-eyed hills.

All things renew.
All things begin.
At church, they bring
The lilies in.

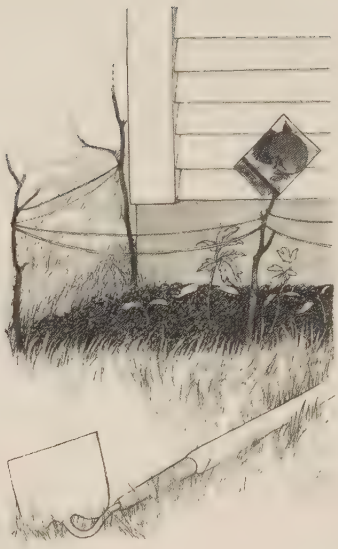
May

Now children may
Go out of doors,
Without their coats,
To candy stores.

The apple branches
And the pear
May float their blossoms
Through the air,

And Daddy may
Get out his hoe
To plant tomatoes
In a row,

And, afterwards,
May lazily
Look at some baseball
On TV.



Mrs. Ms
POPCORN
CREAM
CANDY

June

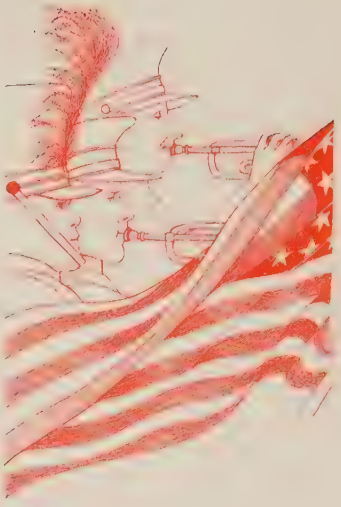
The sun is rich,
  And gladly pays
In golden hours,
  Silver days,

And long green weeks
  That never end.
School's out. The time
  Is ours to spend.

The playground calls,
  The ice-cream man,
And, after supper,
  Kick-the-Can.

The live-long light
  Is like a dream,
And freckles come
  Like flies to cream.

July



Bang-*bang*! Ka-*boom*!
We celebrate
Our national
Independence date,

The Fourth, with
Firecrackers and
The marching of
The Legion Band.

America:
It makes us think
Of ice-cream cones
And Coke to drink.

The shade is hot.
The little ants
Are busy, but
Poor Fido pants

And Tabby dozes
In a pool
Of fur she sheds
To keep her cool.

August

The sprinkler twirls.
  The summer wanes.
The pavement wears
  Popsicle stains.

The playground grass
  Is worn to dust.
The weary swings
  Creak, creak with rust.

The trees are bored
  With being green.
Some people leave
  The local scene

And go to seaside
  Bungalows
And take off nearly
  All their clothes.

September

The breezes taste
  Of apple peel.
The air is full
  Of smells to feel—

Ripe fruit, old footballs,
  Burning brush,
New books, erasers,
  Chalk, and such.

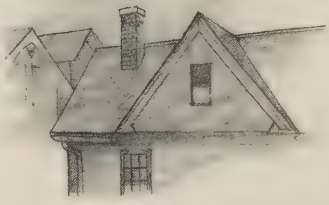
The bee, his hive
  Well-honeyed, hums,
And Mother cuts
  Chrysanthemums.

Like plates washed clean
  With suds, the days
Are polished with
  A morning haze.

October

The month is amber,
  Gold, and brown.
Blue ghosts of smoke
  Float through the town,

Great V's of geese
  Honk overhead,
And maples turn
  A fiery red.



Frost bites the lawn.
  The stars are slits
In a black cat's eye
  Before she spits.

At last, small witches,
  Goblins, hags,
And pirates armed
  With paper bags,

Their costumes hinged
  On safety pins,
Go haunt a night
  Of pumpkin grins.

November

The stripped and shapely
  Maple grieves
The ghosts of her
  Departed leaves.

The ground is hard,
  As hard as stone.
The year is old,
  The birds are flown.

And yet the world,
  In its distress,
Displays a certain
  Loveliness—

The beauty of
  The bone. Tall God
Must see our souls
  This way, and nod.

Give thanks: we do,
  Each in his place
Around the table
  During grace.

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December

First snow! The flakes,
So few, so light,
Remake the world
In solid white.

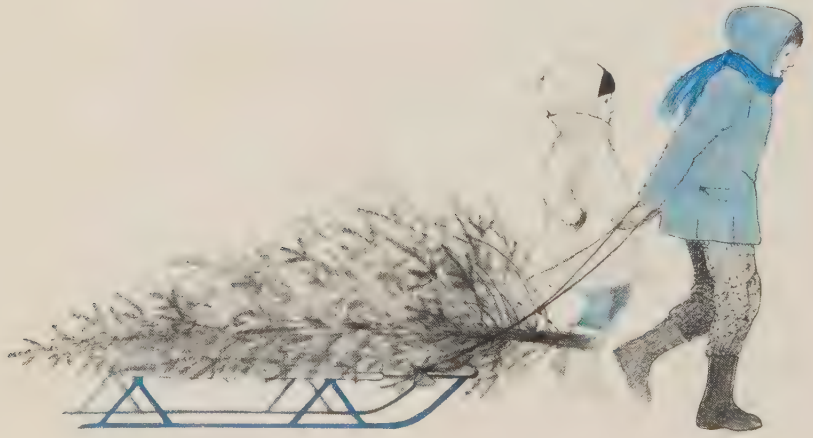
All bundled up,
We feel as if
We were fat penguins,
Warm and stiff.

Downtown, the stores
Half split their sides,
And Mother brings home
Things she hides.

Old carols peal.
The dusk is dense.
There is a mood
Of sweet suspense.

The shepherds wait,
The kings, the tree—
All wait for something
Yet to be,

Some miracle.
And then it's here,
Wrapped up in hope—
Another year!



JOHN UPDIKE, a resident of Ipswich, Massachusetts, is one of America's finest writers. He has contributed stories, humor, and poems to *The New Yorker*. He has published eight adult books and won the National Book Award in 1964 for THE CENTAUR. This is his third book for young readers.

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NANCY EKHOLM BURKERT, though relatively new to the field of children's books, is already considered one of America's outstanding illustrators. Mrs. Burkert is married to a professor of art at the University of Wisconsin who is a printmaker and painter in his own right. They have two children.

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About the Author

John Updike is the 1964 winner of the National Book Award for Fiction as well as a noted poet and short story writer. He is a native of Pennsylvania, a graduate of Harvard University, and a resident of Ipswich, Massachusetts. *A Child's Calendar* is his third book for children. Preceding it were *The Magic Flute*, an adaptation of Mozart's last opera, and *The Ring*, a retelling of the Siegfried legend.

About the Artist

Nancy Burkert manages to be the wife of Robert Burkert, who is a professor in the Fine Arts Department of the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, and the mother of two children, Claire and Rand, as well as a fine artist in her own right. She has previously illustrated *James and The Giant Peach* for Knopf.

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